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(54) Safety belt clamping mechanism

(57) A retainer mechanism for a safety belt includes a retraction reel (2) on which the safety belt web (B) is wound and first and second locking members (20, 22) mounted adjacent the reel and movable towards or away from one another to clamp the web itself or allow the web to move. Relative displacement of the locking members may be caused e.g. by an inertia mechanism on the reel and/or by an acceleration/deceleration sensitive mechanism and/or by a projection adjacent the end of the web. The locking members and reel are mounted on a common frame (4) and the locking members are spring biased by spring (24) (32) away from their clamping position until the actuation mechanism comes into effect, which is sufficient to act against spring (24), (32).

Fig.2.

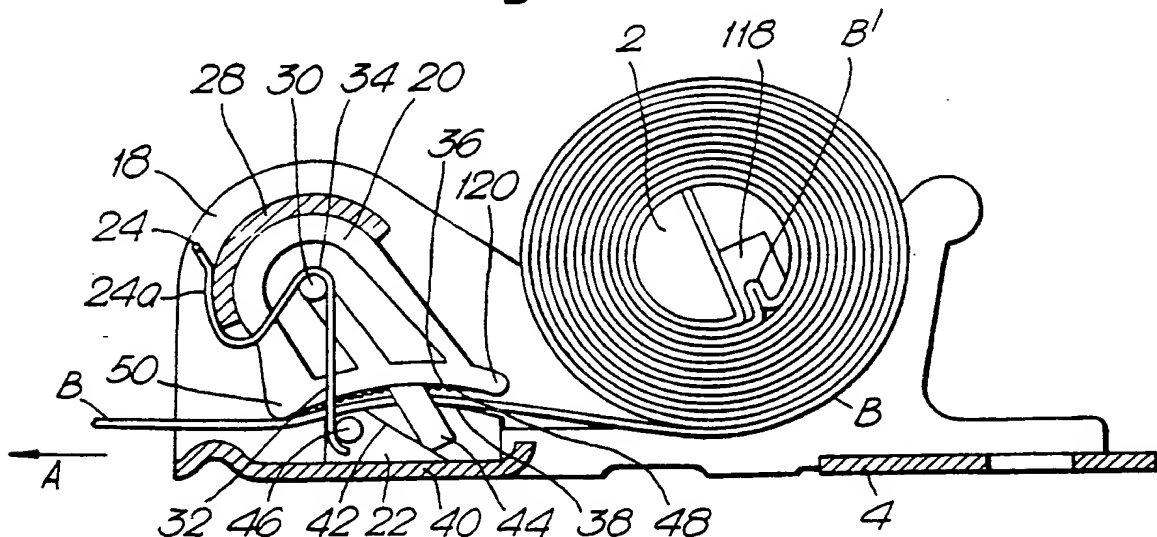


Fig. 1.

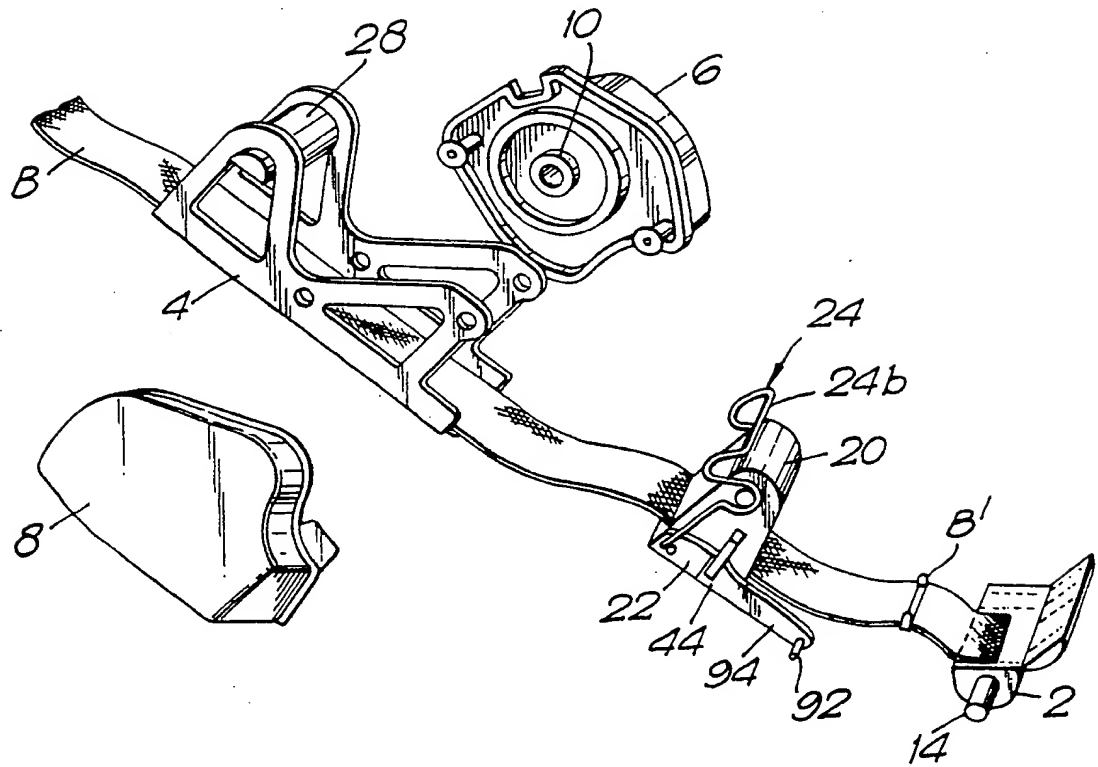


Fig. 2.

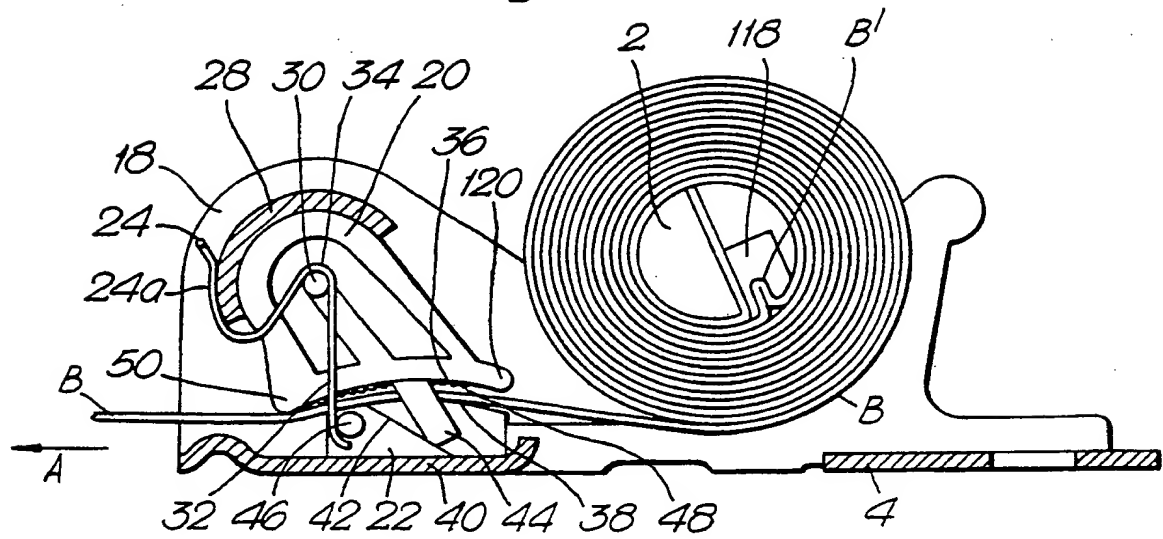


Fig. 3.

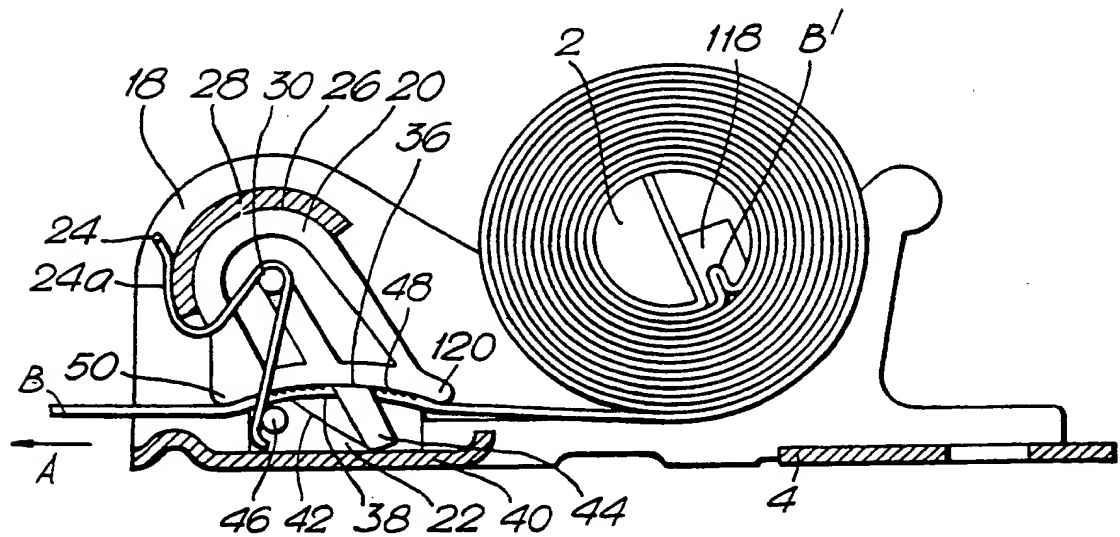


Fig. 4.

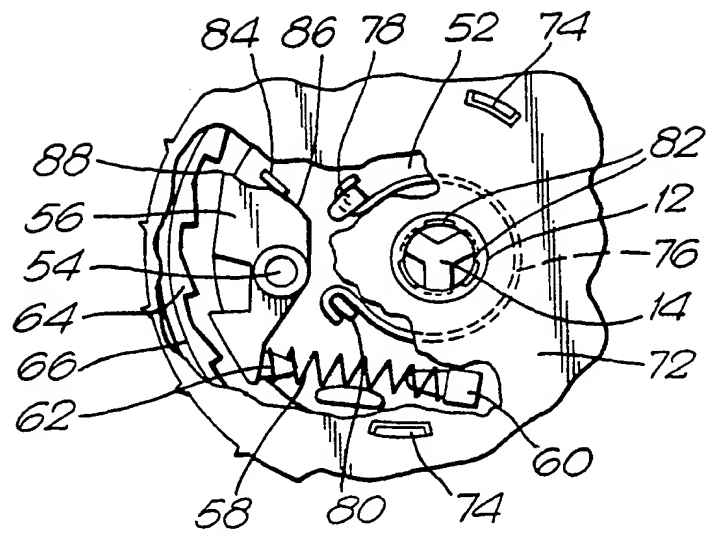


Fig. 5.

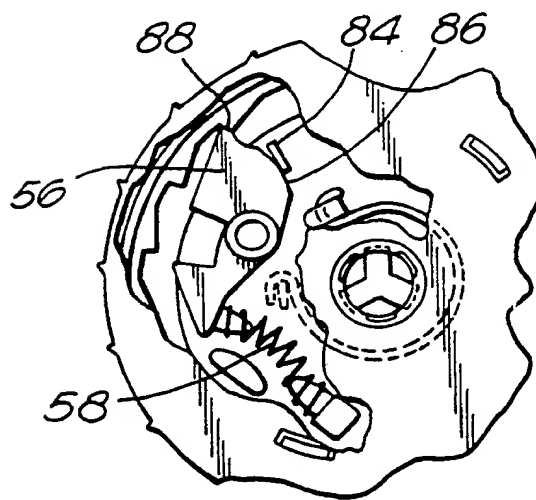


Fig. 6.

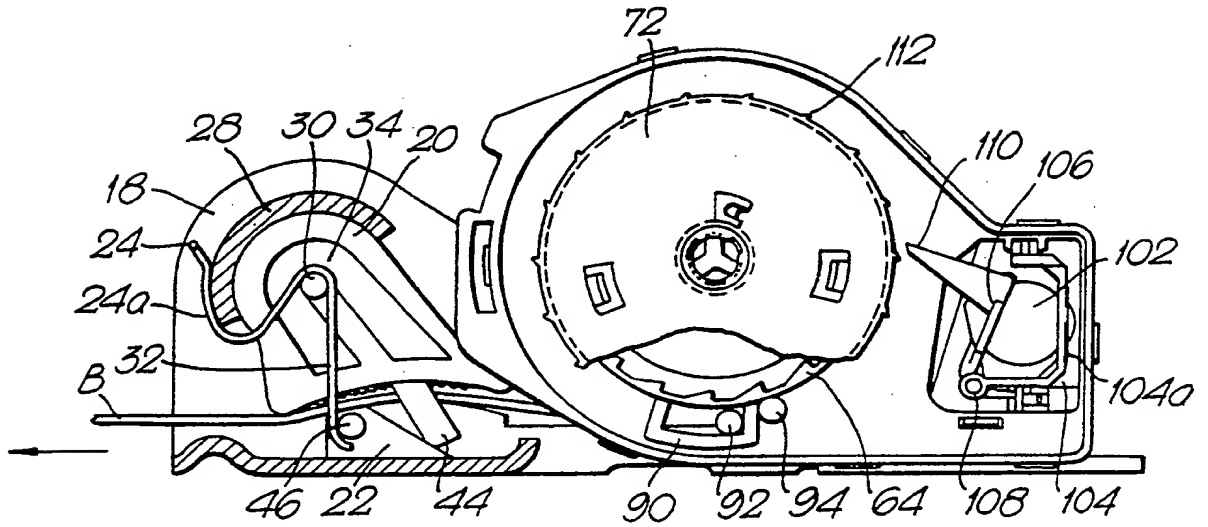


Fig. 7.

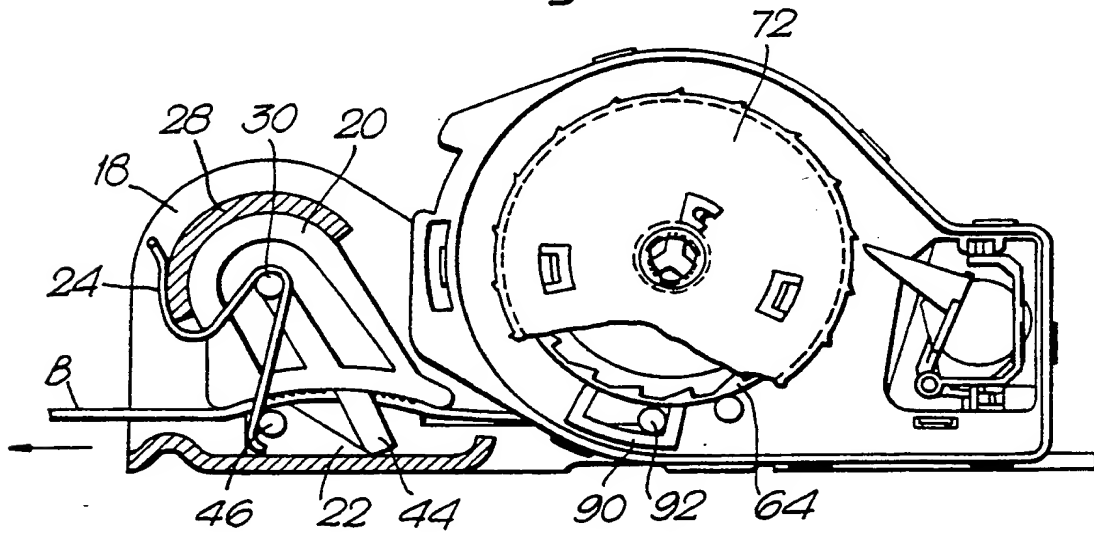


Fig. 8.

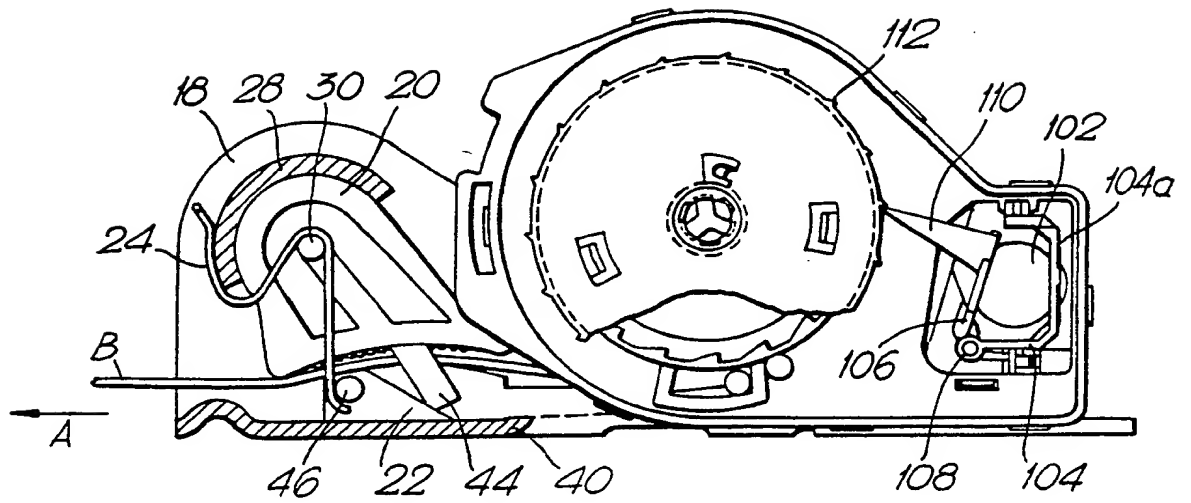
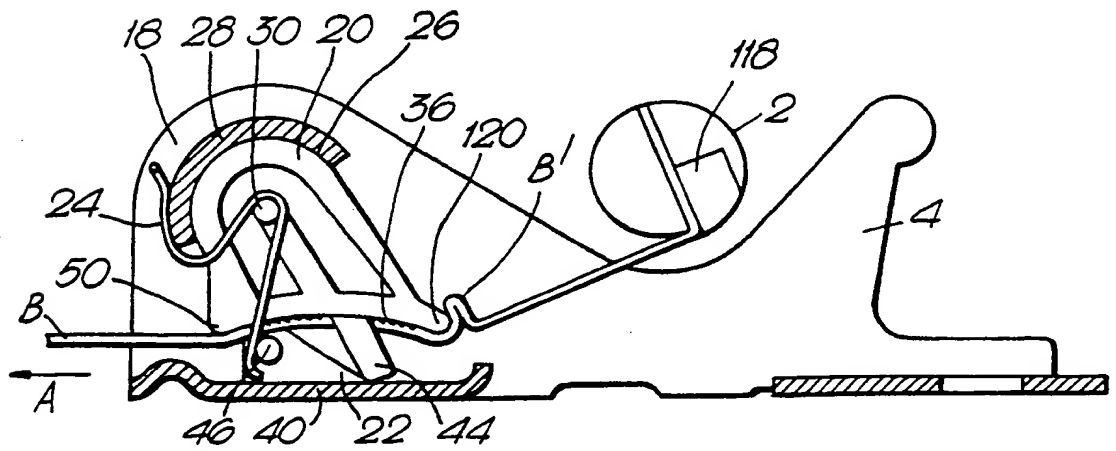


Fig. 9.



SAFETY BELT MECHANISM

This invention relates to safety belts such as are
5 used as passenger restraints in vehicles. It is particularly concerned with a retaining mechanism of such safety belts.

The use of inertia reel safety belts has become widespread in road vehicles. In these, a spindle carrying
10 the belt web is provided with a locking retractor mechanism which comprises a return spring to wind the web onto the spindle and a locking means that prevents web being drawn off if the wearer of the belt is thrown forwards, so as to restrain him in a crash.

15 According to the present invention, there is provided a retainer mechanism for a safety belt comprising a frame, and mounted on the frame, a retraction reel for the belt web and means for locking the web to prevent it from being paid out from the reel, the locking means for the web
20 comprising a pair of members having opposed faces between which the web extends, the members being resiliently biased to a position in which the opposed faces are spaced apart to provide a free travel path for the web, and means to cause relative displacement of the members against said bias, to
25 move said faces relatively towards one another, to clamp the web between them, and to retain the web clamped while it is held under tension.

Such a structure can act very quickly to clamp the belt and restrain the driver or passenger, that is rather
30 more quickly than the conventional reel or frame locking mechanism. Furthermore, it can be made less expensively as the reel can be constructed of plastics material.

Preferably the means for locking the web are placed adjacent the reel. To protect a safety belt against
35 damage when the web has been unreeled from the spindle, it

is required to ensure that the belt tension cannot put too great a strain on the spindle through the end of the web that remains attached to it.

To achieve this, the means to cause said relative displacement of the members against the bias comprise a transversely projecting element on the web, engageable with one of said locking members to move it relative to the other.

Alternatively or additionally the means to cause relative displacement of the members against said bias include, means sensitive to the speed of rotation of said reel whereby when the speed exceeds a certain value, said members are moved relatively towards one another.

These means sensitive to the speed of rotation of the reel may comprise an inertia mass and a ratchet wheel held together by clips which permit them to rotate relatively to each other about the axis of the reel, a torsion spring attached to the ratchet wheel and the inertia mass to constrain relative motion therebetween, a sensing disc attached to the reel, a sensing pawl pivotally mounted on the sensing disc, a control disc freely rotatable about the axis of the reel, ratchet teeth opposed to the pawl and a spring biasing the pawl out of engagement with the ratchet teeth, whereby when the inertia mass is moved, due to sufficient speed of rotation of the reel, the pawl is pivoted, against the action of said spring, so that it engages the ratchet teeth and causes the control wheel to rotate, rotation of the control wheel causing movement of one of said locking members relative to the other.

Again, alternatively or additionally the means to cause relative displacement of said members against said bias comprise a ratchet wheel carried by said reel, a pivotally mounted lever, a detent carried by said lever and engageable with the teeth of said ratchet wheel, a cage, a ball moveable in said cage upon acceleration, deceleration

or cornering of the vehicle in which the mechanism is mounted, to move said detent into engagement with said ratchet teeth to prevent rotation thereof, whereafter any unreeling of the web will cause the inertia mass to continue
5 to rotate and engage the pawl in the control disc thereby to move one of the locking members relative to the other.

By way of example, an embodiment of the invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

10 Fig. 1 is an exploded view of the main components of one embodiment of safety belt retainer mechanism according to the invention,

Figs. 2 and 3 illustrate the locking mechanism for the belt web in its unlocked and locked states respectively,

15 Figs. 4 and 5 are detail views illustrating the inertia locking mechanism in its unlocked and locked states,

Figs. 6 and 7 are a further pair of illustrations of the mechanisms in the locked and unlocked states and show the interaction of the inertia locking mechanism with the
20 web locking mechanism,

Fig. 8 illustrates the operation of the vehicle sensing means on the locking mechanisms, and

Fig. 9 illustrates the operation of the locking means to grip the fully paid-out web.

25 The retraction mechanism comprises a spindle 2 on which the belt web B is wound. The spindle 2 is located between side faces of a frame 4 on which it is held between a spring cassette 6 and a mechanism cassette 8. These cassettes are secured to opposite sides of the frame and
30 each has a hub 10,12 respectively. The hubs, which are engaged by opposite ends of the spindle 2, rotate with the spindle.

Located between the side walls 18 of the frame 4 is a locking mechanism for the run of the web from the
35 spool. This has first and second locking members 20,22

between which the web passes and a spring 24 holding the members in place. The first member 20 has an arcuate top face 26 that seats into a corresponding arcuate cradle 28 which is integral with the frame and extends between its side walls. The member 20 is held against the cradle by the spring 24 which has two U-shaped central portions 24a joined by a bridge 24b engaging the curved outer face of the cradle 28. Projecting from opposite sides of the first locking member 20, are integral pins 30 mounted coaxially with the arcuate bearing surface of the cradle 28. Extensions of the two spring U-shaped central portion 24a of the spring lie on each side of the locking members, in the form of angled limbs 32 in the bends 34 of which the pins 30 of the first member are seated.

The bottom face 36 of the first locking member has a concave shape and opposed to it is a complementary top face 38 of the main body of the second member 22, which rests on bottom wall 40 of the frame. To each side of the main body the second member 22 has flanks with inclined faces 42 that are engaged by integral spigots 44 that extend downwards from the first member 20. Pins 46 project from the sides of the flanks of the lower member 22 to engage the lower extremities of the spring limbs 32. The second member 22 is thus held between the spigots 44 of the first member and the spring limbs 32 so that, in an equilibrium position of the two members, the gap between them is greater than the web thickness. In this state the web B can move freely through the locking mechanism, and in particular is kept clear of gripping teeth 48 on the bottom face 36 of the first locking member because of the concave form of that face, and in particular its front nose 50.

If the second locking member 22 is moved forwards (direction A of pay-out of the belt) against the force of the spring limbs 32, the web becomes clamped between the members. Some forward pivoting of the first locking member

in its cradle will also occur, bringing the teeth 46 into full engagement with the belt. It is a characteristic of the manner in which the first and second locking members 20,22 are mounted that their complementary arcuate surfaces align themselves automatically with each other when they grip the belt so that an effective clamping action is ensured. This clamping action can be maintained by the belt tension, even if the second member 22 is otherwise free to return to the original equilibrium position. Once the tension in the belt is released, of course, the spring 24 urges the locking members 20,22 towards their original positions to release the web. To achieve this the spring 24 urges the pins 46 to the right (Figs. 2, 3 and 6 to 9), and the inclined faces 42 act on spigots 44, to tilt first locking member 20 anticlockwise.

Within the mechanism cassette 8, to effect the locking of the belt, there are mechanisms responsive to the rate of withdrawal of the web from the spool and to the acceleration or deceleration of the vehicle in which the safety belt is being used, when any of these parameters exceeds predetermined limits.

The mechanism reacting to an increased rate of withdrawal of the web comprises a sensing disc 52 (Fig. 4) splined to the spindle 2. On a pivot 54 on the disc 52 is a sensing pawl 56 biased into an inoperative end position (Fig. 4) by a compression spring 58, the ends of which are mounted on respective projecting 60,62 on the disc and on an inner face of the pawl. Concentric with the sensing disc and freely rotatable with respect thereto about the hub axis is a control disc 64 having ratchet teeth 66 opposed to the pawl. A further concentrically mounted sub-assembly comprising an inertia mass 73,77 and a ratchet wheel 72 is held together by clips 74 which permit them to rotate relative to each other about the hub axis, this rotation being constrained, however, by a torsion spring 76 attached

by its opposite ends to respective hooks 78,80 on the ratchet wheel and the inertia mass respectively. The inertia mass sub-assembly is held on the sensing disc 52 by clips 82 that allow relative rotation of the sensing disc.

- 5 Such rotation of the inertia mass sub-assembly relative the sensing disc is normally blocked by a projection 84 of the inertia mass which engages an oblique face 86 of the sensing pawl 56.

If the web is drawn out (arrow A) from the spindle
 10 2 at a relatively low speed without jerking (i.e. under a low G force), the inertia mass sub-assembly will rotate with the sensing disc 52, being carried round by the engagement of the inertia mass projection 84 with the pawl 56. When the web is subjected to higher G forces, because of the
 15 resistance of the inertia mass to acceleration, the reaction force of the projection 84 on the pawl can increase to produce a moment on the pawl which causes the compression spring 58 to buckle elastically and the pawl is snapped over to engage its tip 88 in the toothed control disc 64.

20 The spindle 2, sensing disc 52 and control disc 64 are then locked to rotate together. An outer stirrup 90 (Fig. 6) integral with the control disc 64 surrounds a pin 92 projecting laterally from an extension arm 94 of the second locking member 22. As the control disc 64 rotates
 25 with the sensing disc 52, it therefore displaces the pin 92 and with it the second locking member 22, forwards. As already described, the two locking members are thereby brought together to clamp the web. To allow for dimensional variations in manufacturing, the stirrup is wide enough to
 30 provide some lost motion between the control disc 64 and the second locking member 22. When the tension is reduced sufficiently to free the web, the locking members 20,22 are moved apart causing the control disc to return to its original position and hence, due to the action of the
 35 compression spring, to release the pawl 56.

In a further aspect of the invention a mechanism is provided which will cause the web to be locked as a result of excessively sharp acceleration or deceleration or of excessive tilting of the vehicle, in particular about a fore and aft axis. The mechanism comprises a ball 102 movably held in a cage 104 fixed within the mechanism cassette. The ball rests in a conical seating (not shown) in the bottom wall 104a of the cage (the complete retainer mechanism being oriented with the wall 104a substantially horizontal and lowermost). A lever plate 106 mounted on a horizontal pivot 108 has a hollow conical face resting on the top of the ball as so retains the ball within the cage. If a sufficient inertia force acts in any horizontal direction the ball will be displaced from its rest position and, because of the conical form of the faces engaging it above and below, will swing the lever plate 106 upwards. This pivoting of the lever plate can occur therefore by the ball rolling due to a sudden acceleration or deceleration of the vehicle or due to the vehicle tilting excessively to one side or the other. A detent 110 projects from the lever plate 106 to be engageable with teeth 112 in the ratchet wheel 72 if such movement of the ball occurs.

The effect is then to arrest the ratchet wheel coupled to the inertia mass so that if the spindle tries to rotate to pay out web, i.e. because the wearer of the belt has swayed forwards or sideways on account of the movement of the vehicle, the inertia mass continues to rotate against the torsion spring 76, engaging the pawl 56 in the control disc 64 and operating the locking mechanism through the pin 92 of the second locking member 22 as previously described.

The locking members 20, 22 may also be employed as a lock for the end of the web to prevent undue strain on the spindle 2 when the web has been paid out. For this purpose, near that end of the web secured to the spindle, a projection is provided on the face of the web directed

towards the first locking member 20. This projection is conveniently in the form of a small loop B' sewn into the web near its inner end and normally housed in recess 118 in the spindle. As the loop is reeled off the spindle, it
5 abuts against the rear edge 120 of the upper member 20 as shown in Fig. 9, so forcing the member to rotate forwards in its cradle 28. The second locking member is entrained by the spigots 44 of the upper member and so the members come together to clamp the web. As before, when the tension is
10 removed from the web the web is released.

CLAIMS

1. A retainer mechanism for a safety belt
5 comprising a frame, and mounted on the frame, a retraction
reel for the belt web and means for locking the web to
prevent it from being paid out from the reel, the locking
means for the web comprising a pair of members having
opposed faces between which the web extends, the members
10 being resiliently biased to a position in which the opposed
faces are spaced apart to provide a free travel path for the
web, and means to cause relative displacement of the members
against said bias, to move said faces relatively towards one
another, to clamp the web between them, and to retain the
15 web clamped while it is held under tension.

2. A mechanism according to claim 1, wherein
said means for locking the web are placed adjacent the reel.

20 3. A mechanism according to claim 1 or 2,
wherein the means to cause relative displacement of the
members against said bias include, means sensitive to the
speed of rotation of said reel whereby when the speed
exceeds a certain value, said members are moved relatively
25 towards one another.

4. A mechanism according to claim 3, wherein
said means sensitive to the speed of rotation of the reel
comprise an inertia mass and a ratchet wheel held together
30 by clips which permit them to rotate relatively to each
other about the axis of the reel, a torsion spring attached
to the ratchet wheel and the inertia mass to constrain
relative motion therebetween, a sensing disc attached to the
reel, a sensing pawl pivotally mounted on the sensing disc,
35 a control disc freely rotatable about the axis of the reel,

ratchet teeth opposed to the pawl and a spring biasing the pawl out of engagement with the ratchet teeth, whereby when the inertia mass is moved, due to sufficient speed of rotation of the reel, the pawl is pivoted, against the
5 action of said spring, so that it engages the ratchet teeth and causes the control wheel to rotate, rotation of the control wheel causing movement of one of said locking members relative to the other.

10 5. A mechanism according to any preceding claim, wherein said means to cause relative displacement of said members against said bias comprise a ratchet wheel carried by said reel, a pivotally mounted lever, a detent carried by
15 said lever and engageable with the teeth of said ratchet wheel, a cage, a ball moveable in said cage upon acceleration, deceleration or cornering of the vehicle in which the mechanism is mounted, to move said detent into engagement with said ratchet teeth to prevent rotation
20 thereof, whereafter any unreeling of the web will cause the inertia mass to continue to rotate and engage the pawl in the control disc thereby to move one of the locking members relative to the other.

25 6. A mechanism according to any preceding claim, wherein said means to cause said relative displacement of the members against the bias comprise a transversely projecting element on the web, engageable with one of said locking members to move it relative to the other.

30 7. A mechanism according to any preceding claim, wherein said locking members have complementary curved concave and convex opposing faces.

35 8. A mechanism according to claim 7, wherein the first locking member is pivotally mounted on the frame and

includes the concave face, wherein the second locking member is axially slidable on the frame and wherein the means to cause relative displacement of said locking members comprise means to move said second locking member axially, thereby to
5 cause said first locking member to pivot so that its concave face is brought closer to the convex face of the first locking member.

9. A mechanism according to claim 8, wherein the
10 second locking member is resiliently biased by a spring axially urging said second member and wherein a spigot on the first member engages an inclined face on the second member to maintain said concave and convex faces normally spaced by a distance greater than the thickness of the web.

15

10. A retainer mechanism for a safety belt substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to, and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.

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